

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee 1: Yes, ma'am. Well, now, what do you want to know about?

Interviewer: Well, I'd like to know if you knew what went on over here at Blair Mountain, or what you were doing at the time that was going on.

Interviewee 1: Well, we was striking at that time, and I stayed out 2 years and 11 days the time of that strike.

Interviewer: Oh, really?

Interviewee 1: Yes. And – is that on – going on now?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee 1: I really don't know much about the Blair Mountain fight, but I do know about what happened in Mingo.

Interviewer: I'd like to hear about that. Which mine were you working in over there?

Interviewee 1: I was working at the old Buffalo Mining Company. And they fired us over joining the union. They fired everybody that joined the union in Mingo County. Then the state police come in and made it awful hard. They made the people move out of the camps and into the tent colonies. There was a tent colony and Nolan and one at Chattaroy or Goodman, and one at Lick Creek.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee 1: And everybody had to move out of their company's houses. But in the beginning of that, we come down – the ball and thugs come down from Welch to Matewan. And the first thing they done, they got off at Matewan, they killed a testament, one of the mayor of the town, said they had killed a bunch of them. I think it was 11 they called right in about 2 minutes there.

Interviewer: They had a shootout at the depot up there?

Interviewee 1: Yeah, they had a shootout there. And Sid Hatfield was the chief of police at the time, and they killed the mayor of the town _____. That was the first one they killed, just as they got off the train.

And then they had the – these tent colonies at Nolan, and the boys from Nolan got – there's two of the officers. There's a Kentucky

Home Guard that got in with the boys there at Nolan. They went down the road, come back with a big splint, and guy by the name of Funk met them, and killed the Kentucky Home Guard and the state police, too, a state police named Cackley.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee 1: And they – he tried _____ to let them ____ with the boys that done that, but they – that was with them that done it, but they proved it was him. And my wife's brother got off in the – where you come across the river at _____ on his own property, and they killed him in the boat, the state police did.

Interviewer: Gee. And he was a miner? And he was striking along with –

Interviewee 1: Yeah, he was a miner.

Interviewer: Were all the miners in Mingo on strike at that time?

Interviewee 1: Yeah, every one, and they were all on strike at that time. And then they had a tent colony at Lick Creek, and a fellow by the name of Love, Breedlove, they killed him, the state police did, and drug him into Williamson his feet dragging the ground in the back of a truck. And they – at the funeral, there wasn't a state police to be found. There was a string of people from Williamson to the cemetery, I guess it's – I guess it's about three-quarters of a mile.

Interviewer: Jeez.

Interviewee 1: And old man Bill Porter was the mayor of Williamson at that time, and he – him and the chief of police led the squad.

Interviewer: And just all the miners came out for the funeral? Yeah?

Interviewee 1: They was – I don't know, there was a bunch of them. Well, it was about three-quarters of a mile long, (4:00) the string of miners was.

Interviewer: Gee.

Interviewee 1: And a fellow by the name of Morgan Justice got shot in the time of it. He got shot in the thigh when they went to kill Breedlove.

Interviewer: Now were the miners striking, well, not just for wages, but also for union recognition?

Interviewee 1: Recognition for the union.

Interviewer: When had the union started to organize down there?

Interviewee 1: Nineteen nineteen.

Interviewer: And organizers had come down from up north?

Interviewee 1: They just organized Mingo County, and then this Blair Mountain trouble, it come – they would aim to come over into Tempum and Mingo County, and Don Chafin, the Logan bunch there, stopped them on Blair Mountain.

Interviewer: That's right. So it was kind of like – I understand that what was going on in Mingo kind of got all the guys up north real agitated.

Interviewee 1: Yeah.

Interviewer: And they wanted to come down and help out.

Interviewee 1: Yeah, they came down the other side of the hill, you know, on – come down the Coal River side. They stopped them there in Blair Mountain. Now if you want to know something other about what went on at Blair Mountain. Bob Maynard, Dale Barton, he was right in that bunch.

Interviewer: Bob Maynard, you said?

Interviewee 1: Bob Maynard. Dale Barton, he's a dispatcher, 25 _____ works the hoot owl shift.

Interviewer: Which side was he fighting on?

Interviewee 1: He was a state police.

Interviewer: He was? Uh-huh.

Interviewee 1: Yeah.

Interviewer: You know, one thing I'm interested in, when the fighting started over on Blair Mountain, did the miners down in Mingo know about it? They knew it was happening?

Interviewee 1: Yeah. Yeah. They knowed about – now some of them come to this side, too. And, well, Don Chafin was the sheriff at that time, and then he just, well, the coal company here _____ go – all the men _____ and things went to fight, you know. And Claude Gore had a

brother killed in that fight up there. He used to be the high sheriff of this county, Claude did. He had a brother killed. I'll tell you this one, too. ____ They captured Howard Young and Claude Gore, and they lined them up to killed them.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee 1: Not Claude Gore. Claude's brother, now. I made a mistake there. It was Claude's brother, lined them up to kill them, and they was hesitating, and ____ Claude Gore's brother said, if you're going to shoot us, then shoot us, and about that time, Bad Lewis White walked up and made them turn them loose.

Interviewer: Did you know Bad Lewis?

Interviewee 1: Oh, yeah.

Interviewer: Can you tell me about him?

Interviewee 1: Oh, my, I don't know much about him, but he – he got killed ____ John Hall – well, he killed Taw Hall at ____ Prestonsburg, Kentucky. John and Taw were, reckon was brothers, and he shot John – shot John – he killed Taw and then shot John five times right in the breast, and John shot him, and he fell. He said, what a fool I was. John had had a breastplate on.

Interviewer: Oh. And he had been shielded from the bullets?

Interviewee 1: Yeah.

Interviewer: John – who was he?

Interviewee 1: John Hall, old John Hall.

Interviewer: What did they have against each other?

Interviewee 1: I think Lewis took a woman away from him.

Interviewer: Yeah?

Interviewee 1: And he told him to not come back there, and Lewis wasn't afraid of nobody.

Interviewer: And so they had a shootout between the two brothers and Lewis over there in Prestonsburg?

Interviewee 1: Yeah. Yeah. Lewis –

Interviewer: You know, I had heard a little bit about Bad Lewis. You know, I've been talking to some other people around here, and something –

Interviewee 1: Yeah, and Bad Lewis one time _____ - oh, what was it – what is that Hall's name that – _____ brother? _____ Died of a heart attack, chief of police up in – Fred. Fred Hall and Gray Grant had Lewis arrested one time.

Interviewer: Yeah?

Interviewee 1: And he said, let me get a drink. They had the handcuffs on him. Let me get a drink. And he got a drink, and they took the handcuffs off, get him a drink, he come up with two big rocks and laid in on them with two big rocks. They told me – Lafe (8:42) _____ said that Grant said that – Grant said he'd aim to kill Lewis the next time he seen him, and Grant said he saw – or Lafe said he saw Grant and Lewis meet. Lewis said, Grant, you're going to – I heard you're going to kill me the next time we met. He said, right here is where you or me one either dies, or you're going to run, one or the other. And Grant – Lafe said Grant took off. Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, I guess Bad Lewis was pretty good with a gun.

Interviewee 1: Oh, they said he was.

Interviewer: Uh-huh. And he was one of the leaders of the miners over here?

Interviewee 1: He must have been. He made them turn Howard Young and Gore loose. Howard worked with me, and he told me all about it. Well, I said, Howard, if I was you, every Decoration Day I'd go to Lewis's grave and decorate.

Interviewer: Sure. No, I understand that even Don Chafin was a little bit in awe of Bad Lewis.

Interviewee 1: Oh, yeah. In fact, they all of them – all the law was around, they said.

Interviewer: I heard that Salt and Lucian Mitchell were up there. They got captured, too.

Interviewee 1: Well, I don't know about –

Interviewer: You didn't know them?

Interviewee 1: – about them getting captured. There's a whole bunch up there – well, in fact, every boss and superintendent and section boss from Logan County was up there, they tell me.

Interviewee 2: We hadn't come to Logan County then.

Interviewee 1: We hadn't come to Logan County at that time.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. I take it they had miners fighting up there, too.

Interviewee 1: Oh, yeah.

Interviewer: They had recruited a lot of guys to go up there?

Interviewee 1: Yeah. Well, now, we lived beside of a fellow the name of Mel Curry for about 18 or 20 years. He went up – about all the – in fact, all the bosses went at that time. It wasn't just – Don Chafin was running the country – or the county at that time.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. You told me that a lot of the guys who had been striking down in Mingo came up here and got involved in the battle one way or another.

Interviewee 1: Oh, yeah. You know, it was – they was trying to make them recognize the union at that time. They had an awful time. The state police was actually against the miners that time.

Interviewer: But these guys from Mingo, they came and fought with Chafin or with the other side?

Interviewee 1: No, they – what come fought for the union. And they would have come through, but the Army come in, you know.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee 1: The Army _____ and all the _____ same coming through from Coal River.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Interviewee 1: That's about all I know about. But if you want to get the details of it, you can go to Bob Maynard. Now _____ that died, that killed these three fellows at Big Splint, Bob said he had seen him shoot a man off a stump. The man was standing up on a stump, and he said he wasn't doing nothing, and this _____ shot him off the stump.

And he told Captain Brockston, he said, now don't send me after that man no more. He said, I'll kill him if he just moves. Bob told me that himself. But if you go to see Bob, don't tell him that I said anything about it. Just tell him you heard this.

Interviewer: Okay. Okay. I'll do that. I'll see what he tells me about it.

Interviewee 1: Yeah. And he lives at – was you ever over at Delbarton?

Interviewer: Yeah, I've been down there.

Interviewee 1: He lives up on the Rock House part, next to the – the part next to 25, and he just lives around there across the first bridges. There's a bridge right in Delbarton, and the next bridge out there, he live across the bridge on the left, about the second house – well, it's the first real nice house from – on the left as you come up Rock House across that bridge.

Interviewer: I was wondering if you could tell me a little bit more about the strike. When had you gone out on strike down there in Mingo?

Interviewee 1: It was – I forget what – I believe it was May. I was working at the – working on the cutting machine, and we went out – we joined the union on Saturday, and we went out on Monday, and they said everybody that's joined the union has to go home. Or sign the yellow – they had a paper for sign – we all called it the yellow dogs, you know.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee 1: And they just fired everybody then at the mine I worked – well, at all the mines. Then – that joined the union, but everybody joined the union. There wasn't no coal run for I don't know how long it was before any coal at all run in Mingo County.

Interviewer: That was in May, 1919?

Interviewee 1: Yeah.

Interviewer: And then it wasn't until next year that they had the massacre there at the depot?

Interviewee 1: Yeah. It was the next year.

Interviewer: Did you hear anything about – I heard that Sid Hatfield and Ed Chambers got shot over at Welch.

Interviewee 1: Oh, yeah, Sid Hatfield and his wife and Chambers was going up the steps at Welch, and a fellow by the name of Lively shot them, killed them as they went up the steps. The governor said they was going to send them protection at that time, whoever the governor was. I forget now who it was. But –

Interviewer: Was that Cornwall, maybe?

Interviewee 1: I really forget who it was at that time. But he said he was going to send them protection, and they'd be there at the depot when they got off the train. There wasn't no cars running, wasn't no roads for cars then, you know, to protect them. But as I said Chambers went up the steps, they killed them.

Interviewer: There wasn't any protection there.

Interviewee 1: No, there wasn't no protection at all.

Interviewer: Who was Lively? Was he a state police, or –

Interviewee 1: No, he was a – he was a company thug. Kind of we always called them – well, always called them thugs. They was deputy sheriffs around the coal mines. Yeah, they was just walking up the steps whenever they shot them.

Interviewer: They never tried Lively, did they?

Interviewee 1: No.

Interviewer: Did they ever bring him into court?

Interviewee 1: No, they never tried him. They never tried none of them that done the killing. Never even tried Thunk that killed them three fellows there at Big Splint of lower Nolan. Never even tried the man that killed her brother, but he got killed over here in Sharples. This – the fellow killed him after he got off the state police force.

Interviewer: And who was that? Lively, you're talking about?

Interviewee 1: No, Lively was the one that was up at the Welch, you know.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee 2: Who was that that killed my brother?

Interviewee 1: I forget his name, Mother. But anyhow, he killed – he got killed over here at Sharples, and they tried him here at Logan, give him 15 years for killing that man at Sharples.

Interviewer: Hmm.

Interviewee 1: Now they was awful times in them days. Them young miners don't know what they've got now. The first shift ever I cut coal in Logan County after I come to Logan County, I was in the mines 28 hours before I come out.

Interviewer: Gee.

Interviewee 1: I went to work a many a night – evening at 4:00 and come out at 8:00 and 9:00 the next morning.

Interviewee 2: Did you tell her when you come to Logan?

Interviewee 1: Huh?

Interviewee 2: Did you tell her when you come to Logan?

Interviewee 1: I come to Logan in 1926.

Interviewer: Uh-huh. It was still non-union then, wasn't it?

Interviewee 1: Yeah.

Interviewer: Still _____ wasn't organized right, huh?

Interviewee 1: The union never come till 1933, you know.

Interviewer: So you were here when they all signed up _____?

Interviewee 1: Oh, yeah. Yeah. I was here when they all signed up.

Interviewer: They were all pretty anxious to sign up, then?

Interviewee 1: Oh, yeah. Sign _____ up buzz. You know how much I drewed a day, or payday? Back in the thirties, '31, '32? They give us all under \$1.00 we got, and I made – I averaged – I've got the old – I wish _____ to have still have those statements in there-there in the cedar chest now. I wish I had some to show you. If I made \$35.50, that was real money. And there's – the utility bills come out of that.

Interviewer: Probably a lot other bills, too. Your grocery bills?

Interviewee 1: Oh, yeah, the grocery bills out of that. As I started to tell you, all under \$1.00 you'd get on a statement. Well, I'd keep my statements until I'd get \$1.00 or \$2.00 and I'd go down to the office and get my money.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee 1: And done that all through '32, wasn't it, Mother?

Interviewee 2: Yes, just about it. ____.

Interviewee 1: The ____ 22 shut down at – on the 7th day of March in '32.

Interviewee 2: ____ We went there, too.

Interviewee 1: Lorado.

Interviewee 2: Lorado, then back to Lorado to – where'd you work at then, too?

Interviewee 1: No, not at that spell.

Interviewee 2: Not that spell?

Interviewee 1: No, that was before. (19:00)

Interviewer: You know, one thing you might be able to explain to me is how the guys up north in, you know, Cabot and Paint Creek and all the way down to Blair, the union territory up north heard about what was going on in Mingo. How did they know what was going on down there?

Interviewee 1: Well, now the representative, Bill Blizzard – I believe it was Bill Blizzard – what was the fellow's name, shot Don Chafin?

Interviewer: Bill Pettrick?

Interviewee 1: Who?

Interviewer: Bill Pettrick.

Interviewee 1: Bill Blizzard was the district representative here in – after the union was organized, but there was a representative in Charleston in this – in the time of this strike.

Interviewer: Keening?

Interviewee 1: Yeah. Yeah, that's who it was.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee 1: And he shot Don Chafin after there at Charleston.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee 1: And they had organized or started over there somewhere or another. I just don't know how they started from over there. But the union men over on that side got – north got together and come – they'd come and help the boys over in Mingo, you know. _____ Stopped them from Blair Mountain.

Interviewer: Uh-huh. You know, one thing that one person told me was that a lot of these guys that would get blacklisted down Logan County or Mingo County, they'd go north looking for jobs. And once they got up there, you know, they'd tell guys up there what it was like and how hard it was to organize.

Interviewee 1: Well, now that – that's a fact. I went to Harlan County and got – and worked in Harlan County some. They'd go – leave over there, you see, they'd just get a bread check, and it was \$5.00 to the head of the house, \$2.00 for the wife, and \$1.00 a piece for the children every week. And they went – well, they just scattered out all over the whole country. There was a bunch of us went to Kentucky. I went to Harlan County and worked, right smart _____ bit. And there was a bunch went up north, and just any place you could get a job in the mines, you know.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee 1: And their families would be over in the tent colonies, though.

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah.

Interviewee 1: And that was the reason that – I guess that was the reason that these people from the – well, _____ the north was from the north, they would go over there and make them organize, make them recognized.

Interviewer: Did they bring strike breakers in?

Interviewee 1: Huh?

Interviewer: Did they bring scabs in when you were out in the tent colonies?

Interviewee 1: Oh, goodness, yeah. Yeah, whenever – oh, Blankenship was the high sheriff of Mingo County, he was the sheriff of Mingo County, and they brought a bunch of soldiers in there to guard, and then they – he told them that he was the high sheriff and he could take care of the county. And well, he did. And he appointed that – the coal companies sent a bunch of men up there for him to appoint as deputy sheriff. Every company wanted a deputy sheriff or two. And he sent them back – he sent the men back, and he said, I ain't going to appoint outlaws and murderers in Mingo County, he said, as sheriffs. He said, I'm going to appoint the citizens. I'll call in, he said, who I want to appoint as deputy sheriffs.

And whenever they'd call them in, they didn't keep them very long, though. They said they didn't need them. And then they got so hot, the soldiers, they called the soldiers in.

Interviewer: Yeah?

Interviewee 1: And the soldiers guarded there for a right smart bit. I don't know how long they did guard.

Interviewer: Now who were the people that were coming in to break the strike? Were they –

Interviewee 1: They'd go out and bring them in, transportation.

Interviewer: Yeah. Were they from the cities up north, or were they –

Interviewee 1: No, they're just any place they could get them.

Interviewer: Yeah?

Interviewee 1: They had a –

Interviewer: A lot of colored people with them?

Interviewee 1: Oh, yeah, and there was foreigners, too. But they didn't want – Colonel Haulire in Williamson, they had a big sign up out from the depot down in the strike area, and if you _____ gotta wants to work, you can work, and if you don't want to work, he'd make them – he'd make the company pay – buy the tickets back home, the fellows that brought them in there.

Interviewer: Must have been pretty dangerous for those guys to go down in the mines and work them.

Interviewee 1: Well, it was. It actually was.

Interviewer: Huh. They were liable to be shot by the strikers, weren't they?

Interviewee 1: Yeah. Yeah, they had a nice smart time there for about two years and a half.

Interviewer: How did you manage to feed your families and stuff, the guys who couldn't find work in Harlan and other places?

Interviewee 1: Well, the union give them – as I said a while ago, the union give the head of the house \$5.00 a week.

Interviewer: Yeah. And that was enough to live off of?

Interviewee 1: And the wife \$2.00, and the child \$1.00 a week. And they called it bread check. And then everybody was camping around and finding little odd jobs. I never knows of none of them starving to death.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. Did you – what finally happened to the strike? Why did you go back to work, finally?

Interviewee 1: Well, they just – I reckon they just starved them out, and they run out of funds. I reckon that union run out of funds and quit giving the bread checks, they called it.

Interviewer: So pretty much broke the back of the union, then, didn't they?

Interviewee 1: Yeah.

Interviewer: When did you finally get organized down in Mingo?

Interviewee 1: Well, it was in '32, or '33.

Interviewer: It wasn't until then that you finally got the –

Interviewee 1: Then they organized. When Roosevelt got elected, they organized. And they recognized the union, then.

Interviewer: Did you know of these fellows that worked as organizers down in Mingo that came down and signed people up, gave them the application?

Interviewee 1: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah?

Interviewee 1: Oh, yes, I sure do. I sat _____ with, uh, Morgan Justice, this fellow that got shot when Breedlove was killed, he lived up on the hill _____, and I'd hear him going up, I hear he organized Mingo County, and I heard him, I knowed his voice, and I went down, and I said, Morgan, is this you? He said, yes. What are you doing here? He said, we're going to organize – he said – the words he said, all the demons down in hell can't keep us from organizing Logan County now, and we're going to organize Logan County.

Interviewer: Yeah?

Interviewee 1: And we had _____ tried to have a smart conversation he's the man that organized Mingo County. And him and Plato Kitchen organized Logan County.

Interviewer: What was that other fellows name?

Interviewee 1: Plato Kitchen?

Interviewer: _____ Toe Kitchen?

Interviewee 1: Plato Kitchen.

Interviewer: Ah. How about that. What a funny last name.

Interviewee 1: Yeah. They organized the – Logan _____ the last one recognized the union.

Interviewer: Yeah? When did you meet Morgan for the next time?

Interviewee 1: Nineteen nine – oh, goodness sakes, wait a minute. I met him long – about 1917.

Interviewer: Is that so?

Interviewee 1: Yeah.

Interviewer: He was down here that – or was he born around here?

Interviewee 1: No. He was a – when I first met him, he worked with _____ land. And they run Borderland, first one into the mines, 1916, '17, I forget which.

Interviewer: So was he from Mingo?

Interviewee 1: Yeah.

Interviewer: How had he become an organizer? Do you know?

Interviewee 1: I guess – I have an idea the union got him to. They knowed he was a good organizer, you know. He wasn't afraid of nothing, and he'd tell just what he thought about the companies.

Interviewer: And so he went work with them down there, and –

Interviewee 1: Yeah.

Interviewer: – started signing the guys up?

Interviewee 1: Yeah. The first – the first meeting they had was down here, Monitor Ballpark.

Interviewer: Yeah?

Interviewee 1: On Friday. And then I wasn't there, but I guess every miner practically in the county was there.

Interviewer: Yeah?

Interviewee 1: And they had a paper or a – where I worked, mine number seven, Owl Creek, a fellow by the name of Parsons was the superintendent. We went down, my wife and I and the children went down to Wayne County to her sister's, and come back, and Parsons and all the rest of them had joined that – they called it the Company Union. And they sent word for me to come down and join the Company Union.

I went down, and while I was there, Preacher Wilson come in. He and me was the only ones that hadn't signed that Company Union. Their boy said, go ahead and sign this. He said, how all the United Mineworkers ain't going to get in there. He said that had a little meeting up there at Monitor Ballpark Friday night, and he said, and there was just a handful there, and I heard what a crowd there'd been, you know?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee 1: And I said, Parsons, supposing I join the union, and the United Mineworkers come around? Oh, they ain't a coming around, they said. They ain't a coming around. And, well, I said, well, I'll join, then, if they ain't coming.

And he had a sign up on the side of the window – I want this to get int here, too. He had a sign up on the side of the window, payroll window, come and work two hours and _____ flour. And a fellow by the name of Luther King got that sign, and sent it to Vanay Bitner.

Interviewer: Yeah?

Interviewee 1: And Mr. Francis was in Washington, was in the – told the Congress and Senate how good they was to their men. They furnished them gardens, which they did. They furnished gardens, garden seeds. But then how good they was to them, and they said Vanay Bitner got that little slip, and said, here, Mr. Francis, he said, read this to the Senate.

Interviewer: Yeah?

Interviewee 1: And they said Mr. Francis just pulled that up, stuck it in –

[End of Audio]